

SOCIAL ACTION



Girls in Reform Schools

by Adah Bass



December 1, 1936

Ten Cents

SOCIAL ACTION

National Organ of the Council for Social Action

CONTENTS

THE PROBLEM	4
What Usually Happens; Did She Do Wrong?; Girls From Nice Homes.	
THESE ARE THE GIRLS	9
Saved By An Election; Ellen is a Murderess; One of Many.	
THEY GO TO PRISON	12
A Room of Her Own; Girls' Dormitory; School Days; Recreation; Boys and Girls; Girl Friends; Religion; Learning to be a Housemaid.	
PUNISHMENT	17
Whipping; Solitary Confinement; Silence; Privi- leges; Punishment Cottage; Physical Health; "You Can't Make Brains"; A Job; Growing Up.	
NOT SO BAD	23
Better Than Jails, But—; Be Good, Sweet Maid; Can an Institution be a Home?; Home, Sweet Home.	
AND SO WHAT?	26

SOCIAL ACTION, Volume II, Number 19, December 1, 1936. Published twice a month, except July and August, by THE PILGRIM PRESS, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Subscription \$1.00 per year. Ten cents each for single copies. Seven cents each for ten or more copies. Entered as second-class matter September 15, 1936, at the Post Office at New York, New York under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Girls in Reform Schools

by Adah Bass

Foreword

The Council for Social Action presents this pamphlet on girls' reform schools in the United States as indicative of the need for the kind of social action with which the church has customarily concerned itself. We wish to point out, first, the failure of society in the immediate problem of the reform school and, second, society's responsibility for those conditions which breed delinquency and reform schools. The church has a high tradition of turning the spotlight of public consideration upon such problems, and of suggesting in the name of humanity and brotherly love some more adequate procedure.

The material in this pamphlet has been gathered from the reform schools of more than half the states of the country by competent individuals. It is based upon first hand observation. One of the investigators is a high school teacher who knows intimately the homes which comprise the areas of disorganization in a large city, the homes from which most of these girls come. The other investigator is a woman physician on the staff of one of the finest social research projects of our day. One of the staff of the Council for Social Action has compared the findings of the authors with the findings of authoritative commentators in the social-economic field and written the conclusion beginning with *And So What?*

There are many relevant points not touched upon here, among them: what happens while girls await trial; follow-up after they have been dismissed from the reform school; statistical correlation between delinquency rates and the incomes of the girls' families.

We feel that the facts here presented are the materials of life and therefore the concern of religion.

MARGUERITTE H. BRO

The Problem

In the reform schools of this country are some 8,000 girls who, quite obviously, have incurred the disapproval—if not the wrath—of society to the extent that they are being “reformed.” The institutions in which they are kept are variously called by such names as “reform schools,” “houses of correction,” “state industrial schools.”

Most of the girls have been sentenced by the court for “delinquency” which usually means sex delinquency although this in itself is not a statutory offense in some states. Frequently “delinquency” is accompanied by “incurability” which usually means that the girl has defied the truancy officers, refused to obey her parents, or been a ringleader in unwholesome neighborhood activities. Some girls are committed for petty thievery and like crimes; occasionally a girl is committed for murder; practically all the rest for sex offenses. Boys are far less likely than girls to be called to account for sexual delinquency. For them “delinquency” and “incurability” usually mean petty thievery or similar law breaking. Custom lays a much heavier hand upon the so-called wayward girl.

Obviously, not all girls who have physical intercourse with a member of the opposite sex are brought before the law. A girl becomes a public charge only when sexual irregularity is causing her to stay away from home overnight, or when she becomes pregnant with no one to take responsibility for her or the child, or when she is reported as spreading venereal infection, or when the gang she travels with is of a semi-criminal or suspicious character and when the home is incapable of handling her adjustment.

From over a hundred girls who told their life histories may be abstracted this picture of the usual procedure by which a girl becomes delinquent.

The girl is poor and her home life is unhappy. She belongs to no group and has no special interest around which her social

life is built. Gradually she becomes aware of a gay group in her community whose chief interest is sex—dancing, playing around, having parties, exchanging excited whispers and giggles over mysterious happenings.

The girl longs to join them and finally does gain tentative admittance. Her period of initiation is usually unpleasant but is borne for the sake of becoming part of the much desired group. After her initiation, the girl finds herself "belonging"; her companions claim her as one of them and the experience is new and delightful to her. Sometimes after she has become integrated into this sexual group, opportunity is offered to join a more socially acceptable group. But by this time she has found the ordinary activities of young girls too tame for her. She feels mature, smart, sophisticated.

Even in the socially acceptable group, frequently the criterion of sex experience is held up to the girl. In one of the settlement houses of Chicago, a drama group was formed of the younger teen-age girls. The girls spontaneously arranged their own group, but there was objection to the inclusion of Mary R—. The director could not get at the cause of the objection: Mary was popular, Mary could act, Mary wanted to join, she was not the youngest nor the oldest of the group nor did she seem to vary from them in any way. Finally one of the girls stated the group's objection. "Mary's still a virgin." They felt with all the animosity of a primitive tribe that Mary was still a child and did not "belong" among the initiated.

The case histories of the girls in reform schools show high ratings of divorce among the parents, spasmodic employment of one or both parents, charity or relief assistance, crowded housing, poor food, unsanitary surroundings, lack of playground experience or supervised leisure time activities, abundance of cheap movies, exposure to sex irregularities within the family or gang, deficiency in school caused by lack of clothes, undue employment out of school hours, mental inadequacy or indifference on the part of the family.

What Usually Happens

It is well to hold in mind the fact that in cities, half of the total number of delinquent girls come from that "area adjacent industrial districts" in which only one-quarter of the city's girls live. (Clifford B. Shaw, *Delinquency Areas*)

In concrete terms, the average delinquent girl has certainly never had a room of her own but instead has shared a bed with sisters and probably brothers; has never had a clothes closet for her own belongings but has hung her scant apparel with the rest of the family clothing on gas jets, back of chairs, or occasional nails in the doors; has eaten indifferently cooked food at indifferent hours always within sight of a pan of cold greasy dish water; has shared a community bath room in a more or less public hall; has owned few if any books; has not attended Sunday School, girls' club, nor had any creative activity such as music; has sought public approval, the commendation of someone whose opinion she cherishes, the affection of some individual, acceptance by her associates or those with whom she wishes to associate.

Did She Do Wrong

Perhaps it is not irrelevant to ask at this point whether the girls know they are doing "wrong" when they commit the sexual irregularity for which they are sentenced. There is no statistical answer but there are significant facts. Most children consider as "right" and "wrong" exactly the same actions which their parents would designate as right or wrong.

The Hartshorne-May researches show a close correlation (52.5%) between the ethical standards of parents and their children. In many cases, at least one parent of the delinquent girl leads what is termed a sexually irregular life. The chances are that the girl knows that fact, is accustomed to having her mother bring men home or having her entertain the "boarders" overnight. Even if the girl knows that "other people"—meaning society—do not approve, she is likely to consider the behavior pattern of her parents "all right." The chances are

that the standards of that part of society which forms the girl's immediate environment do not vary greatly from the standards of the girl's own home.

Of course, sometimes the parents disapprove of the girl's conduct and she is aware of their disapproval, but for her the approval of her own associates sets her real ethical standards: what they accept becomes for her not only "all right" but to a degree compulsory. Probably she has never heard discussions of "right" and "wrong." Where would she get such objectivity? Church schools, young people's groups, Girl Scouts, Girl Reserves, Y.W.C.A.—none of these has been hers. Her outside experience—her contact with the larger society—has come through the sort of books and movies which clothe with glamor and a degree of beauty the experience which her young adolescence already predisposes her to accept.

To sit in court while these girls are being questioned and sentenced is to see indifference and resentment far, far more frequently than shame. "Right" and "wrong" are comparative terms carrying wide variations in meaning within different countries, different cultures, and carrying equally wide variations in meaning within the same country, the same general culture. Society may have a general standard but when a great many individuals who make up that society have *no experience with the standard*, they may consequently feel no compulsion for its maintenance.

Girls From Nice Homes

When girls do take exception to the standards of their parents, it still depends upon the sort of homes they come from as to what the outcome of their delinquency may be.

Mary and Evelyn, aged fourteen and fifteen, lived in a small town in the middle west. They had good homes, their parents loved them, their school work was average. They were pretty and movie-struck. They wanted to go to Hollywood. Mary's family laughed at her pleas good-naturedly and advised more schooling first. Evelyn's mother scolded her se-

verely. They felt they were not understood. Evelyn took ten dollars from her mother's purse and, hand in hand, the girls started out on the road.

That night when they did not come home, their mothers were frantic. At 11:30 Evelyn's mother called the police; at 12:00 she was wringing her hands and crying on Mary's mother's shoulder. The next day she continued her frantic telephone calls to the police, and to the local and state newspapers. She went to bed with a sick headache.

Three days later the two girls were picked up in Denver and the two mothers flew there to bring their little daughters home. Gratefully they thanked the police who had found them, kissed and hugged two hungry, frightened children, and took them home. Within the week the two friends were back in school.

Thus the story ends. The family doctor had discovered that neither of them had a venereal infection and no one but the doctor and the mothers ever knew that these two respectable families had delinquents on their hands. Home and forgiveness was all that was necessary to persuade them to wait until they had finished high school before they went to Hollywood, and by then they had decided otherwise.

Society has other ways, too, of protecting the girl of economic privilege. At sixteen Mary Lou wanted to get married. Her family said "no" emphatically. Both Mary Lou and her "boy friend" were in college and neither could afford to antagonize their families. They decided to wait. But waiting was hard. They were in love. And so they became "delinquent." Mary Lou was an intelligent girl and found out about contraceptives. She was happy and doing well with her college work. Her family relaxed gratefully for Mary Lou said no more about marriage.

When she was through college she did not marry the boy. Indeed, she had four lovers before she married the fifth. By all apparent criteria she is now a successful wife and mother and is making in addition a substantial contribution to her

profession. Society has propped her up, so to speak, all along the line until she finally found her own integration. Society gave her economic security, education, professional training; she never had to sacrifice her pride, her feeling of equality among her friends, her chance to "make good." Right or wrong, society saved Mary Lou many times; the idea of court or jail never remotely crossed her mind.

But other girls are not propped up by society. They happen—just happen—to come from homes which can afford them no protection. Not only no protection from detection and consequent blame and punishment, but their families cannot protect them from failure to qualify in society. They are the derelicts; no course is charted for them and they know too little of the high seas to chart their own courses. Their haven is a reform school. They are punished for the crime of lacking a home.

These Are The Girls

Not the most spectacular girls, nor the drabest, but fair samples. For instance, Susan:

Susan was an orphan and lived her whole life in a charitable institution. Life was dull but Susan was not. She was bored; she chafed at the inactivity, the monotonous routine. She wanted to "see life" and she ran away. They brought her back, gave her a physical examination and duly marked upon her record, "Physical condition—virtuous." Susan was spanked and locked up.

As soon as she was free, she ran away again. Again she was examined; virtuous. The fourth time that she ran away from boredom, she was found to be no longer virtuous and was promptly transferred to the State Training School for Girls. She was sassy, disobedient, and had more demerits than any other girl. In solitary confinement she climbed to the tiny barred window ten feet above her head and shouted to the other girls and called the matron names.

Susan was seventeen. She had never had a nickel in her hand to spend. She had never been shopping nor worn anything but orphan and reformatory uniforms. She had never owned anything of her own, not even a pocket handkerchief. She had never been allowed to use cosmetics. Susan had never talked to a boy except when she ran away; she had never been to a public moving picture, had never eaten in a restaurant nor in a private home; she had never been to a party. She had read every book in both institutional libraries and knew nothing at all about real people. The world had been bound by regulations which had very little to do with Susan as a person. She had no place to use her intelligence.

Saved By An Election

In Susan's state a new governor was elected and promptly there were new superintendents and wardens in all the jails. The new superintendent of the State Training School for Girls instituted a reform regime.

Her first step was to measure the intelligence of the girls to judge whether they should all be trained as domestics. Susan obviously should not. Very soon she stood highest in the new class in business training. Within a year she was at work in an office at \$15 a week—and happy for the first time in her life. Now she is boarding with a family who are not only her legal guardians but who have taken a personal interest in her. They have helped her over the rough places, taught her to say "How do you do?" instead of rising and standing stiffly at attention whenever an adult comes into the room. On the books of the reformatory—where she need not have been in the first place—Susan is marked as a success.

Ellen is a Murderess

When Ellen was seventeen, she lived alone in the woods with her father who was seventy-two. He had taken her out of school; he refused to allow her to look for work; he did not permit her to go into town with other young people. Her

few friends were warned away with a shot-gun. The food was scarce, clothes scarcer, but Ellen washed, scrubbed, cooked, and waited on the old man. He beat her and attempted sexual relations with her.

One night, while the old man slept, she took the rabbit gun down off the wall, and shot him. The neighbors came around and said the only trouble was that she should have shot him long ago. For 73 days Ellen sat in the county jail while her guilt was judged. In her state there is no death penalty. Popular opinion in the community held that she had committed a crime, no doubt, but that nevertheless she had rendered the state a service.

She was sent to the reformatory and for the next four years worked and slept behind bars. She was a good girl there, causing no trouble. Indeed, Ellen obeyed every rule eagerly. She was pleased with her new surroundings. Sheets, knives and forks were all new to her. She had always eaten rabbit stew and the new food was interesting. The gingham aprons, the white Sunday dresses, the companionship of other girls, singing, games and the occasional movie did not at first strike her as punishment.

After a year, she settled down to prepare herself for parole. She is not particularly bright but worked hard and almost finished four years of High School. Her perfect behavior would have earned any other girl in the institution a parole but owing to the nature of her crime she was not dismissed. Ellen was disappointed but kept her disappointment to herself until the next meeting of the parole board, sure that the next time she would make good.

Now Ellen is almost twenty-one, at which time the reformatory automatically releases its inmates. But no one will sponsor Ellen; no one will give her a job. She is a murderess, and people are afraid. She has been trained in all the household arts and is equipped to be a first class maid. She has had commercial training and could fill a minor office position. She has been obedient, good-tempered and faithful. Toward what

end? A woman from another state offered to take her, but the responsibility for a murderess, even a child murderess, cannot be transferred to another state. Therefore, "owing to the nature of her crime," upon Ellen's release from the reformatory she will be sent to the county poor farm.

One of Many

Jenny was the victim of incest. Her father was the guilty person. She became a mother at thirteen. She is locked up for the remainder of her adolescence. At eighteen she may be paroled.

Anna's mother was a prostitute and began forcing the child to accept attentions of men when she was ten years old. When the mother was apprehended, she could not pay the fine. And so now both Anna and her mother are in jail, but the mother will be free before Anna will. Anna has a venereal infection which prevents her being placed in another family. When she leaves, she will probably be paroled to her mother.

They Go to Prison

Let us go with Lucy Mae from the court room where her stepmother has said, "She don't come home in the night," and Lucy Mae has said, "Sure, I got a boy friend. I got two boy friends," and the judge has said, "State Training School for Girls until she is eighteen."

With Lucy Mae we approach the institution, we ride through the gates, through the wide expanse of lawn, and on to the receiving cottage. Perhaps we spend a few days in the institution's hospital being thoroughly examined. Another good procedure, we vaguely understand, but new and terrifying just for its newness. Finally we go to our cottage and put on the long white cotton ribbed stockings, the shapeless cotton bloomers, the faded blue uniform. The curl comes out of our hair, the rouge from our cheeks, the manicure from our fingers. We begin to scrub floors. Of course, we do not sense

the relationship between the cure and the disease but apparently there is nothing so highly recommended as scrubbing floors for curing a girl of sexual promiscuity. Besides, the last reform wave insisted that reformatories be clean.

A Room of Her Own

Lucy Mae is assigned a room. It is ten by six feet and contains a white iron bed, a dresser, a chair. After a while, Lucy Mae, like the other color-starved girls, will make a crepe paper doll or a pink applique doilie to put in the middle of the bed, but for now it is plain white. Across one corner of the room hangs a white curtain, and behind it there is a hook. There are bars on the windows, and a lock on the door and a peek hole through which the matron may look at any time. There is no heat and no light. At eight o'clock Lucy Mae puts on her long white cotton nightgown, hangs her "dress" on the chair and puts it out into the hall. Then she is locked in.

Lucy Mae is permitted to put pictures on the wall—within limitations. No pictures of men except father or brother. No pictures of babies—not even the quints—because if babies were approved to the extent of having their pictures displayed, then, as one matron said, "the girls might think it was perfectly all right to be pregnant." Within a month, a pencil will be hidden in the bed springs. Pencils to write notes are forbidden and universal. There are certainly no books or magazines.

Girls' Dormitory

Some reform schools provide dormitories instead of rooms. White beds, row on row. One of these is the home-place, where one belongs and can be alone. Along the wall out in the hall hang the rows of uniforms. Where does one put the letters from home, the pictures, the trinket that is one's very own? Nowhere. A matron sleeps on a similar bed and monitors are appointed to "keep order." No pillow fights, no talking, no whispered confidences, nothing but silence. If a girl is overwhelmed with loneliness and attempts to crawl into bed

with another for comfort, she merits the sternest punishment. Two by two, marching to bed, rising to the signal of a bell and two by two marching out—so are the errant 'teen-age girls taught to conform to the current moral code when they are released.

School Days

Half a day is spent in lessons more or less up to the standard of regular public schools, except that discipline is much stricter and spontaneity becomes that much more rare. Intelligence tests are sometimes given. The average is, of course, pulled down by the feeble-minded cases who should never have been sent to the reform school. But the tests mean little practically for in very few institutions does the information so gained make any difference in the treatment accorded the girl. In the better institutions a special class may be formed of the illiterates and very low-grade mentalities.

Recreation

As any student of adolescent psychology would expect to find, the schools with a full recreation program have the least discipline problem and the fewest runaways. The school whose whole recreation program consists in providing permission for one hour's conversation finds that a multiplicity of bolts and bars does not keep its runaway score as low as that of others where comparative freedom is the rule.

In the better schools the list of leisure time activities is imposing. Sports, swimming, band, orchestra, chorus, dramatics, parties, concerts, movies, reading, knitting, pageants, even dances. Some schools do indeed attempt to keep the girls so happily busy that they will cause no trouble. Baseball for an hour or more every day will often keep a girl from attempting to run away. She will develop a wide stance, a swinging stride, and a measure of self-confidence that probably she has never had a chance to develop in any other way. The musically

inclined find adequate release, and are without doubt the best behaved girls.

Boys and Girls

"To whoever finds this note: I love you." A little girl wrote the words and dropped the paper in the garden near the fence which separates the girls' institution from the boys'.

Of course there is bound to be something strained about a recreation program where the sexes are segregated. Many girls' boarding schools suffer from similar strain, but weekends and holidays and summer vacations and normal family relationships make up, at least in part, for the effect of segregation. For the reform school girl, who is imprisoned because she did not understand the proper and acceptable relationships between the sexes, to live for several years with unanimously female companionship is certain to keep her "moral"—or homosexual—for that length of time, but what effect it may have upon her subsequent adjustment to a man-dominated world has not yet been determined.

Several states have placed their delinquent boys and girls in the same or neighboring institutions. The boys and girls go to the same classrooms but must not speak, look at each other, or exchange notes. In one of these, 20 per cent of the boys and 10-15 per cent of the girls are wearing blue striped uniforms with the red letters L.P.D. (lost privilege detail) embroidered on their backs—privileges lost for "communicating," smiling, talking, exchanging notes.

Louisiana and New Hampshire are among the states taking high honors for normal adolescent activities, including healthy and happy friendship between boys and girls. In Louisiana, the girls were taken by the superintendent to a nearby C.C.C. camp to dance, and the idea has been greeted with awe by other state superintendents. In New Hampshire, the boys and girls are in one school. They make friends; they have parties together. They sometimes fall in love and marry and "live happily ever after."

Girl Friends

The problem of homosexuality arises, just as it does in any community composed exclusively of one sex. A wide variety of measures are taken. One school will punish offenders severely. Another will separate them and punish them only if they attempt to communicate with each other. One institution encourages homosexuality, because "then they won't run away."

Religion

In some states fully 80 per cent of the girls in the reform schools are from Protestant families, or families which mark no other religious preference. The rest are Catholic. There have been occasional Jewish girls within the last five years.

Church services are ordinarily interdenominational. Chapel on Sunday afternoon and Sunday school on Sunday morning are very popular, largely because of the singing. Sometimes there are additional services during the week—prayer meeting on Wednesday nights, devotions or reading a chapter from the Bible every evening at bed time, and at one school religious services three times daily—morning, noon, and evening devotions.

Where religious services are substituted for recreation, restlessness breeds trouble. Within an institution, as without, it is easy to substitute religious words for religious practices.

Learning to be a Housemaid

Even in the schools which allow the most time for education and recreation, there is still a large half day to be spent "working." Scrubbing, washing, ironing, cleaning under close supervision for several years entitles a girl if she is diligent to be "graduated" to the kitchen. After another apprenticeship of cleaning pots and pans and vegetables, she will learn to cook institution food. Kraut and frankfurters on Monday, macaroni on Tuesdays, with cookies twice a week. The last stage, and the highest honor of all, is to be allowed to cook and serve for the superintendent.

Unless our Lucy Mae is demoted back to scrubbing for discipline, she will be a well trained domestic by the time she is ready for parole. A job will be found for her in some home earning from \$2.10 per week to, in unusual cases, as much as \$5.25. Thus Lucy Mae is economically self-supporting and the state feels sure there will be no further temptation for her to run away or to accept money from men. Of course, the fact that she has not handled money during all these years in confinement may make it a little difficult for her to develop immediate economic perspective. The most intelligent girls, including those who rate in the 'very superior' class, usually receive the same training and should make really excellent maids.

The laundry arrangements frequently indicate the attitude and philosophy of an institution. In one, a separate building houses complete modern electric laundry equipment with which the girls are trained to become efficient laundresses and thus, upon parole, enabled to earn several dollars a week more than they would as "maids." As a special compensation to the laundry workers, they receive ten cents a week credit with which they may buy candy between one and two o'clock on Friday afternoons.

In another institution a different philosophy of work prevails. With a bar of soap and a washboard, sheets must be turned out as white as in any professional laundry. Each sheet is given a grade, and credits toward parole are earned by receiving high marks. The laundry matron is very proud of the exquisite work turned out by her girls. Since she considers hard work "good" for them, the ironing is done with old-time sad-irons, and demerits accumulate for the tiniest scorch.

Punishment

Most schools have eliminated the strict "merit system" because it tends to develop questionable practices: the girls come to balance the pleasure of disobedience against the number of demerits and to calmly accept the demerits and the added

months of imprisonment. The "tattle tale" learns to sell her comrades for 30 pieces of special privilege. The better schools prefer to judge each case separately. However, some kind of merit system—although called by another name—is in use almost universally, and punishment is dealt out for the following activities: escape, attempt to escape, plan to escape, tattooing, insubordination, homosexuality, vandalism, stealing, lying, swearing, smoking, forbidden correspondence, impudence, quarrelling, inattention, uncleanness, having pencil in room, whispering during silence. But, on the other hand, for reporting a planned escape—750 extra merits.

Whipping

One by one the worst abuses have fallen away. Whipping grows less frequent each year. One superintendent who abolished it less than a year ago said, "And you know, I don't think the girls are any worse now than when they were afraid of being whipped!"

"There is some whipping in 38 of the 57 schools. In 13 we believed that whipping was used with sufficient frequency to be considered a regular form of punishment." (from Margaret Reeves: *Training Schools for Delinquent Girls*, 1929, Russell Sage Foundation). In most of these schools the whipping is administered by the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent.

"Spanking or paddling are the most dangerous of all disciplinary measures," in the opinion of Judge Charles W. Hoffman of Cincinnati, "and when applied in the cases of delinquent adolescent girls are the most cruel, futile and ineffective measures that ignorance, vindictiveness and hate can devise."

Solitary Confinement

Solitary confinement is a very common form of punishment. The confinement may be anything from being "sent to one's room" for the afternoon to isolation in an underground or attic cell for as long as six months. "Nine of the fifty-seven (reform schools) had prison-like steel cells or strong wooden

cages, generally situated in attics or basements; in one institution we found a padded cell." (Margaret Reeves: *Training Schools for Delinquent Girls*).

Sometimes a consultant psychiatrist examines each girl who has been confined for three months to judge whether she is insane. The psychiatrist is permitted to make no suggestions as to the treatment the girls should receive, nor to cry out against the system. She may merely say whether or not the girl is now psychopathic.

In "solitary" there are no books, writing materials, sewing, nor any other things to pass the time away. There is an iron cot, high walls, a tiny window well out of reach, and that is all. The Kansas reformatory is conspicuous for having a lavatory and toilet; many institutions have only a mattress on the floor and an open vessel toilet.

Into the plaster, scratched with fingernails, besides obscene terms, will be found such legends as these:

Wait till I'm 21.

Write here how many times you ran away.

Oh, hell, it can't last forever.

Silence

Silence is the regular routine in some reform schools. The girls work, study, walk, sleep, day after day, in silence. In Kentucky, one hour of "speaking" is allowed per day as recreation. In Nebraska, meals are in silence until the matron tinkles the "speaking bell," otherwise "they'd never get any food passed."

In other places a normal amount of talking is permitted, except on forbidden subjects. In Indiana, a stern matron, arms folded, stood over the three silent girls cleaning the kitchen, girls who were too frightened even to return a smile from a visitor.

In more humane schools, where silence is enforced only during school and work, a girl may be punished by being "put on silence." She must not say a word to anyone, and no girl may speak to her on pain of similar punishment. Smiling recognition, nods, and hand-waving count as talking.

Privileges

Withdrawal of privileges is the usual punishment for minor demeanors such as quarrelling, talking back, and carelessness—in those institutions where there are any privileges to be withdrawn. Attendance at the weekly or semi-annual movie and the holiday parties, playing on the cottage baseball team, writing an extra letter home between regular monthly letters—these are taken away. Demotion to the laundry or floor scrubbing detail, a full day's work, instead of half a day in school—a variety of ingenious punishments can be invented within the formula: whatever a girl likes must be taken from her and whatever she dislikes must be added unto her.

Punishment Cottage

As an additional humiliation there is in 15 of 57 reform schools studied the punishment cottage, a separate home for the "worst" girls where distinguishing uniforms, more drab than the rest, must be worn, where extra locks and bars hold the doors, where extra work is given and fewer privileges granted. Up to 10 per cent of the girls are constantly "on punishment," and for these, of course, there is usually a lengthening of the sentence. The punishment cottage also contains those who have not made good on parole and who will be kept out of society, therefore, until they are 21. They seldom care how much punishment they get, knowing that when they are 21 they are unconditionally free.

To be sure, in some reformatories the punishment cottage is a place where the most poorly adjusted girls may get special care and consideration, but in others it is a dreaded hate-breeding straight-jacket.

Physical Health

Most reform schools at the present time do provide sufficient care for the physical health of the girls. A thorough physical examination, upon admittance, and correction of all remedial defects is standard. However, many schools still do not have a resident physician; some do not care for the teeth and eyes; others could improve their treatments for venereal infection.

Some of these delinquent girls are infected with venereal disease. Obviously, we cannot allow such infection to go unattended. But the incarceration of 8,000 girls, about 10 per cent of whom are infected, will never stop the plague of syphilis while an estimated 6,000,000 syphilitically infected persons are at large. If we really want to stamp out syphilis, probably it can be done, but the necessary measures would be drastic.

The addition in reform schools of facilities for plastic surgery for unusual cases would not be amiss. A fifteen year old vagabond who had tramped the country for shame of a birth scar covering half her face is now being held in a reform school. Slowly, new skin is being grafted onto her face. Her return to normal society will be a star in the crown of that Superintendent. Fences and locks are unnecessary to keep that girl there, nor are the "Rise, March, Halt!" commands necessary to make her "good."

"You Can't Make Brains"

Intelligence tests are essential to an understanding of a girl in difficulties. The feeble-minded person cannot benefit by moral precepts, nor benefit greatly from education. Permanent liabilities should be recognized as such and their permanent care arranged for.

However, too much confidence should not be placed in tests of intelligence, because the effect of fear and of emotional maladjustment is to lower mental ability. The placement of each girl should depend upon her proved ability, and no case

counted as a success unless some advance from the original level of attainment is secured. In the best reform schools these intelligence tests are given, but in some there is a tendency to use the results as an excuse for low standards rather than as a challenge.

The schools in reform schools are often their best feature, especially when educators are in charge. That such schools suffer from unreality is a truism, but so do many schools on the outside. Some reform schools include four years of high school; others, too small for high school, put the girls to a full-time working program when they have finished eight grades. Still others, most intelligently of all, place enough confidence in these girls to send them to the nearest public high school where they can earn a diploma unstigmatized.

A Job

A healthy and schooled individual must also be able to earn a living. Domestics, laundry workers, and seamstresses earn ridiculously inadequate sums. Yet these are the main vocations for which the girls are trained. Stenography and beauty culture courses have been added to some reform schools and are popular. The ideal reform school would make a constant search for methods of training girls in occupations in which they could earn a decent living. As domestics the girls are very often expected to care for young children. Throughout their reform school training, however, they are carefully removed from all children and from all mention of children.

But occupational training is only half. Wages must be earned and also the money must be spent. The girls must learn how to spend it wisely.

The scale of social maturity indicates that the fifteen year old girl should be able to buy all her own clothing and have discretion over her own spending money. Normal children in normal families learn about money during these adolescent years. Reform school children are usually committed at just this critical age. Just at the time when they should be taking

over responsibility, it is taken from them. Nevertheless, they must adjust to normal buying-and-selling as soon as they are freed.

Growing Up

Maturing is such a difficult process that many of us never accomplish it. Girls who reach reform schools very often have matured in some ways too early, through pressure of circumstance. A balanced maturity can only come through opportunity to make decisions of her own. What is better for an adolescent who has heretofore made unfortunate choices of parents, of friends, of activities, than to practice choosing under circumstances where wrong choices will not be so disastrous?

The ideal reform school will pay a girl wages for the work that she does; will permit her to buy her clothes, to pay for her board and room, to buy or rent books and magazines, to pay her own way into an entertainment—all in a manner approximating the practices in the normal world. A complicated system of bookkeeping may be necessary, of course, but there is no reason why the brighter girls could not take care of this as a part of their vocational training. In England, a certain boys' reform school has tried this plan and, although they make the situation unreal by paying only 30c. a week in wages and charging only 1c. for movies, they have found their boys growing in self-confidence and responsibility.

Not So Bad

"After all," one may sigh, "this is not so bad as jail." There are no armed guards with guns standing over the girls; they do not sit in silence all day in cement and iron cells; they do not mix with older hardened criminals. They are safe from physical harm, the food is sufficient, the beds are clean; they do go to school and they are learning housework.

It is true that the reform school is the most enlightened form of incarceration yet invented. It was to combat the evil effects of idle imprisonment, of contact with hardened criminals, that

reform schools were built in which boys and girls were separated from older criminals and from each other. The conditions under which girls became the prey of men jailers had aroused public indignation to such a pitch that by 1929 the 48th state established a training school to which girls were sent, instead of to prison.

Better Than Jails, But—

Reform schools are a step forward from jails, yet they are direct descendants. Sanitation is better, punishments are easier, time is better occupied, but the philosophy behind both is still essentially the same. Essentially, a reform school is a place of incarceration where the one thing a girl has to look forward to is release. The original theory behind the plan was that silence and idleness, restraint and suffering, would cause malefactors to contemplate their sins, repent, and reform. If repentance did not ensue, then the fear of further punishment would furnish the restraint from evil-doing.

We now know that these results do not follow. Thus treated, the resentment against society festers. Whatever character may have been present grows more and more feeble. In dank places, plants grow white and die, but mold and parasitic growths flourish. Thus with humans.

Abused, unfortunate girls exist. To cry out against their imprisonment is not to say that nothing should be done with them. As long as society is so organized that little girls are allowed to grow up in poverty and to suffer abuse, we will need repair shops to salvage them. But such salvage shops will have to cut loose entirely from the incarceration tradition and build anew. Physical, mental, vocational, social and moral aspects of each girl will have to be studied and built up where lacking.

Be Good, Sweet Maid

In most reformatories, there is no lack of moral instruction. The girls are made to understand quite clearly that they are

"bad" and that the matron over them is "good." And yet the girls might be less unhappy and belligerent about their reformation if they understood a little more. An honest attempt to explain what such things as customs and *mores* are, how they grow, why they are enforced, and why and when they are disregarded, is perhaps a great deal to expect. And yet such explanation is the only way to be honest with these girls.

Instruction about sex might seem unnecessary. These girls have had first hand experience. Yet their eagerness to know the physiological truth is amazing. To be truly helpful, the physical as well as the ethical considerations must be taken up and the Anglo-Saxon rather than the Latin language used. Where these methods have been tried the response has been gratifying.

Can an Institution be a Home?

The very best reform school that could be built, then, would include boys and girls; would teach a trade to each according to his ability; would take good care of the health of all; would provide payment for work and permit certain purchases; would offer a complete athletic and recreational program; would have a school with courses in the growth of ethical standards, as well as the more usual subjects.

Naturally all locks, bars, bolts and fences would disappear. Petty regulations designed to keep the children from running away would be increasingly unnecessary. There would be no "solitary," no uniforms, no silence, no marching to meals. Rooms would be decorated by each occupant to suit her own taste. She could keep there her own things; peek-holes, inspections for hidden pencils—all would be abolished. Cosmetics need not be forbidden.

The staff would have to be picked, not on the basis of politics but on the basis of competence. The disgrace of prisons in almost every state can be traced directly to the spoils system. With each incoming administration, a new staff takes

charge of the state institutions. Very often they are qualified and efficient vote-getters or relatives of such persons. Sometimes they also understand children, but that qualification is more or less accidental. When a Superintendent cannot discharge a matron for gross disobedience of rules or even for cruelty to the girls because the hiring was done in the state capitol, little can be expected in the way of morale. Sympathy, understanding, and a willingness to learn are even more important than formal training.

A fairly ideal arrangement would be cottages for not more than ten children, presided over by a married couple. But no institution can be an ideal arrangement.

Home, Sweet Home

"No institution, however good, can be as good as a home, however bad." This may not quite be true when—as in too many instances—home is half of a hall bedroom, the other half of which is a house of ill-fame. Yet usually a home is preferable.

Most students of reform school methods feel that adoption of the delinquent girl (much preferably the pre-delinquent) into a foster home is the only real salvation for these unlucky children, ninety per cent of whom have broken no law. They have been searching for normal human satisfactions which have been denied them in an acceptable form. Given those satisfactions, given encouragement, love, admiration, friends, success in however small a field, they are no longer a problem, but an asset.

And So What?

What is all this to us? We are sorry enough; we have long passed the smug satisfaction of those who say, "I have enough to do in looking after my own girls and I know they will never end in a reformatory." We do look after our own girls and we do have a reasonable assurance about them. But we are

modern socially-minded citizens, we are mothers within a democracy, we are Christians. We admit we care and we wish that we knew "something to do about it."

First, it is important to be sure that we really do care. Because if we don't, we will be a sentimental liability. Unless we can count on ourselves to have the adult imagination to keep on seeing and feeling an extraneous situation *as if it were our own*, then we will only start something we cannot finish. We will have a meeting or two, and tell a few neighbors, and write a letter to our Congressman—and feel "dreadful" to think society is so callous—and revert to our former state. If we do not care, probably no one will care because after all there is no other group of women in the country so conditioned to caring and acting upon their heart-felt concerns as are the church women. But if we do care, we have already achieved the creative awareness which is the essence of religion.

Second, as soon as we actually care, then we inform ourselves. It is impossible to do otherwise. Some facts we can get by reading. We can send for the report which is made annually by the superintendent of our state's reformatories to the governor. We can read it carefully and understand the ideals therein expressed—and not be misled thereby. We can, like the social scientist, accept the facts tentatively, subject to our own checking. We can also read one or two of the latest books listed in the attached bibliography. We can talk with a psychiatrist or educator who knows the problem. We can bring such speakers to our group.

But reading is not enough. We have to see. Most of us have access to some of the typical places from which delinquency springs. We can go into the crowded sections of the city and see for ourselves what it means to walk up long dark flights of stairs to flats of crowded, smelly, cold rooms from which there is no escape for those who live there. We do not need to go in droves as on a sightseeing tour. But we can wander about alone hunting a fictitious friend, asking for a drink of

water, doing any friendly spontaneous thing which comes to mind. We are not merely curious, we aren't snooping, nor specimen hunting, nor deigning to look down from our heights. We are honest humans who have hitherto been too much shut off from the drab misery of our time and we mean to make amends personally for our dullness.

When we come home from a day in the dirty, noisy, cheerless part of our city, *we* can take a hot bath, change our clothes, eat a hot dinner, sit in comfortable solitude to think over our experience. But those whom we left are still where we left them.

After we have some sort of picture of the background of delinquency, *we can visit a juvenile court* and listen hour after hour to the cases that come in. We put ourselves in the place of the girls, but also we must put ourselves in the places of the truant officer, the policewoman, the social service expert, the judge. The problem has many phases and we do not begin to understand until we are first bewildered and powerless in the face of it.

Finally, we can go to our state reformatory. Not all of us can go, but in any honest group there is someone to go and see and come back to share experiences with the group. We will be more likely to see the phases of reformatory life of which we can approve than those of which we cannot approve. Good food, physical care, systematic school work, gymnastic equipment, such things are apparent. But solitary confinement, long periods of silence, lack of wholesome conversation, sexual segregation, the artificiality of the life, the unfairness of these girls being institutionalized—some of the realest liabilities are least apparent to a casual observer.

When we reach a conclusion as to changes in management and procedure which should be made in the name of decency and democratic education, then *we can publicize our findings and our demands.* Reports to the newspapers, reports to the

women's clubs, the civic organizations, the churches, the chambers of commerce, the educational societies, all such reports are the stuff of which public opinion is fashioned. It is true that our letters to our Congressmen may not be read but they are weighed. A ton of requests for the reformation of our state reformatory will not be ignored.

But it cannot be too heavily underscored that *any kind of a reform school is a poor substitute for a home*. Reduced to its simplest formula: girls are in reform schools because they lack adequate homes. Not because they are "bad." Thousands of girls in better homes take the same exceptions to the standards of sex which society, as a whole, openly advocates, and privately tends to ignore. But girls in the better homes are readjusted to society by—and within—their family-and-friends set-up. They are not ostracized, branded as failures, subjected to unwarranted punishment, and perhaps permanently handicapped as they are likely to be upon becoming inmates of a state institution. Even granting that the reform school is a healthier, kindlier environment than the home from which the underprivileged girl has come, it is a long way from a genuine home.

The Jewish Homefinding Society proceeds upon a far more realistic basis in finding homes for the girls who need special care. *Homes* are Protestantism's best answer to the problem of the delinquent girl.

However, underneath the whole problem of rehabilitating the girl whom society brands as "delinquent," is the fundamental matter of preventing the conditions which breed delinquency. Within an experimental, growing, dynamic society, variations from the norm in principles of conduct are inevitable, but a healthy society provides its own equilibrium: homes, by and large, look after their children and save them the consequences of public disgrace which are often as harmful as any possible consequence of their actual conduct. Our paramount task is to look to the conditioning of the homes, to

provide for them their share of economic resources, to promote schools, leisure-time facilities, and opportunity for work which pays a living wage to the young adolescent who has finished school and wants to achieve on his own responsibility.

Back of the problem of the reform school, there are other matters of personal responsibility, perhaps less easily measured but none the less imperative. Standards of conduct, the violation of which brings underprivileged girls into reform schools, are community matters. We admit the existence of a general laxity in sexual standards. Whether such laxity is a concomitant of social growth or an adjunct of social deterioration is not completely determinable. But we cannot refute the figures compiled by reputable investigators revealing a high percentage of sexual experimentation in our colleges and high schools. We can do our best to evaluate these new standards against our own experience and ideas, and also against the opinions of educators, physicians, sociologists and ministers whose experience is wider and whose judgment is more objective. Probably this whole problem has deeper emotional content than any other which we must face with the younger generation, and is consequently more difficult to handle wisely.

When we arrive at a thoughtful judgment as to what our sex standards are, then we have to re-measure the present conduct of our own children. The very late parties, the unchaperoned night driving, the patronage of night clubs and road houses by high school boys and girls and by their parents—these are the specific actions of which currently accepted conduct is made. And currently accepted conduct becomes the moral standard at the basis of law.

We are the state: we can continue to perpetuate the conditions which produce delinquency and reform schools or we can eradicate them. But in working toward far ends, we cannot overlook the welfare of the 8,000 girls now in our reform schools.

Names and Location of Reform Schools

- ALABAMA—Alabama Reform School, Mr. Meigs; State Training School for Girls, Birmingham
- ARIZONA—State School for Girls, Randolph
- ARKANSAS—Arkansas Training School for Girls, Alexander
- CALIFORNIA—Ventura School for Girls, Ventura
- COLORADO—State Industrial School for Girls, Mount Morrison
- CONNECTICUT—Long Lane Farm, Middletown
- DELAWARE—Delaware Industrial School for Girls, Claymont; Industrial School for Colored Girls, Marshallton
- DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA—National Training School for Girls, Washington
- FLORIDA—Florida Industrial School for Girls, Ocala
- GEORGIA—Community Home for Girls, Atlanta; Georgia Training School for Girls, Atlanta
- IDAHO—Idaho Industrial Training School for Girls, St. Anthony
- ILLINOIS—State Training School for Girls, Geneva; Cook County Home for Dependent and Delinquent Girls, Chicago
- INDIANA—Indiana Girls School, Indianapolis
- IOWA—Training School for Girls, Mitchellville
- KANSAS—Girls Industrial School, Beloit
- KENTUCKY—Kentucky House of Reform (Girls Dept.), Greendale; Louisville and Jefferson County Children's Home, Anchorage
- LOUISIANA—State Industrial and Training School for Girls, Alexandria
- MAINE—State School for Girls, Hollowell
- MARYLAND—Montrose School for Girls, Reisterstown
- MASSACHUSETTS—Industrial School for Girls, Lancaster
- MICHIGAN—Girls Training School, Adrian
- MINNESOTA—Hennepin County Home School for Girls, Minneapolis; Home School for Girls, Sauk Center; Ramsey County Girls Home School, St. Paul
- MISSISSIPPI—Mississippi Industrial and Training School, Columbia
- MISSOURI—State Industrial Home for Girls, Chillicothe; State Industrial Home for Negro Girls, Tipton
- MONTANA—Montana Vocational School for Girls, Helena
- NEBRASKA—Girls Training Home, Geneva; Nebraska Industrial Home, Kearney
- NEW HAMPSHIRE—State Industrial School, Manchester
- NEW JERSEY—Essex County Parental School, Newark; Hudson County Parental School, Bayonne; State Home for Girls, Trenton
- NEW MEXICO—Girls Welfare Home, Albuquerque
- NEW YORK—State Training School for Girls, Hudson
- NORTH CAROLINA—North Carolina Industrial Home for Negro Girls, Efland; State Home and Industrial School for Girls, Eagle Springs
- NORTH DAKOTA—State Training Home, Mandan
- OHIO—Blossom Hill School, Brecksville; Girls Industrial School, Delaware
- OKLAHOMA—State Industrial and Training School for White Girls, Tecumseh; State Negro Girls Training School, Taft
- OREGON—State Industrial School for Girls, Salem
- PENNSYLVANIA—Gumbert Industrial School for Girls, Perrysville; Pennsylvania Training School, Morgantown; Sleighton Farm School for Girls, Darling
- RHODE ISLAND—Oaklawn School for Girls, Howard
- SOUTH CAROLINA—South Carolina Industrial School for Girls, Columbia
- SOUTH DAKOTA—South Dakota Training Home, Plankinton
- TENNESSEE—Colored Girls Vocational School, Nashville; Tennessee Vocational School for Girls, Tullahoma
- TEXAS—Girls Training School, Gainesville; Harris County School for Girls, Bellaire
- UTAH—State Industrial School, Ogden
- VERMONT—Vermont Industrial School, Vergennes
- VIRGINIA—Virginia Home Industrial School, Bon Air; Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls, Peaks Turmont
- WASHINGTON—State School for Girls, Grand Mound
- WEST VIRGINIA—Industrial Home for Colored Girls, Huntington; West Virginia Industrial Home for Girls, Industrial
- WISCONSIN—Wisconsin Industrial School for Girls, Milwaukee
- WYOMING—Girls Industrial Institute, Sheridan

Readings on the Adolescent Girl

- The Adolescent Girl*, by Winifred V. Richmond. Macmillan, 1925, 212 pp., \$1.25. A book for parents and leaders based on actual clinical studies.
- The Unadjusted Girl*, by W. I. Thomas. Little & Brown, 1923, 261 pp., \$3.00. "Human wishes have a great variety of concrete forms but they are capable of the following general classification; the desire for (1) new experience, (2) security, (3) response, (4) recognition."
- The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, by Jane Addams. Macmillan, \$1.25. A new generation has grown up since Miss Addams wrote this book about the youth of her own neighborhood, but her realistic and sympathetic account is timely today; her insights helpful.
- The Family*, by E. R. Mowrer. Univ. of Chicago, 1932, 364 pp., \$3.00.
- Five Hundred Delinquent Women*, by S. S. and Eleanor Glueck. Knopf, 1934. 549 pp., \$5.00.
- Delinquency Areas*, by C. R. Shaw and others. Univ. of Chicago, 1930, 240 pp., \$4.00. The first successful attempt to study the problem from the standpoint of the social and cultural setting in which delinquent behavior appears.
- Crime*, by Nathaniel Cantor. Univ. of Chicago, 1935, 43 pp., 25c. "There are no born criminals." This pamphlet shows how they are made and considers what shall be done about it.
- Russia, Youth and the Present Day World*, by Frankwood Williams. Farrar and Rinehart, 1934, 270 pp., \$2.50. "Shows how the attitude towards family, marriage, education and future security is helping to better human relationships in Russia."—BOOK REVIEW DIGEST, 1934.
- Middletown*, by Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd. Harcourt, 1929, 550 pp., \$5.00. Insight into the social processes of a representative American community as it concerns the home, the use of leisure, making a living, engaging in religious practices and in community activities.